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On the

Healthy Home Life

of School Children

NOTES FOR PARENTS
AND GUARDIANS.

BY

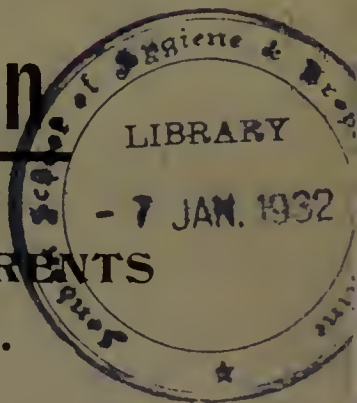
Professor Dr. LEO BURGERSTEIN
(OF VIENNA).

Eleventh Revised Edition.

Translated by R. T. WILLIAMSON, M.D., F.R.C.P.
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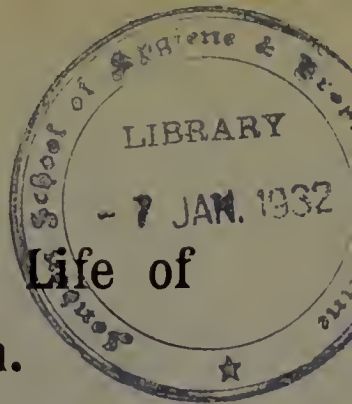
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Note by the Translator.

PROFESSOR BURGERSTEIN'S pamphlet has been translated into fifteen languages, and in Austria it has reached the eleventh edition. An English translation has been made, in the hope that it may be of service to those who are interested in the physical and mental development of British children. An endeavour has been made to convey the meaning of Professor Burgerstein's recommendations and rules in English modes of expression, rather than to give a literal translation of the pamphlet. Several paragraphs and sentences have been omitted, because they referred to Austrian customs and modes of life, and did not apply to the habits of British school-children.

R. T. W.



On the Healthy Home Life of School Children.

SCHOOL boys and girls should learn to get up at once, after awaking in the morning. They should rise sufficiently early to allow enough time for washing, dressing, taking breakfast, and walking to school. The breakfast should be taken without hurry, and therefore it should be ready at the right time, and should not be too hot. In order that school children may be able to rise sufficiently early, they should not go to bed late.

After breakfast, as well as after every meal, the mouth should be thoroughly rinsed out with clean water.

The scholars should not leave home too late to be in time for school; but it is not desirable that they should arrive at the school more than a quarter of an hour before it commences. Also it is desirable that they should not arrive home late from school.

When the scholars come home at mid-day, they should wash their hands before dinner; and this should be done before every meal. When the scholar has to attend school in the afternoon, the mid-day meal should be easily digestible and not too heavy.

The children should take their meals with their parents, since this is of service from an educational standpoint.

After the chief meal rest from mental work should be strictly enjoined, and vigorous bodily exercises should be avoided.

A more substantial evening meal is desirable when the mid-day meal has been a light one. This is especially desirable for children who eat little during the day, but have a good appetite in the evening. Such children may eat as much as they wish in the evening, provided the food is easily digestible. The evening meal should not be taken just before going to bed.

The food eaten by children has not only to make good the waste going on in the tissue of the body, but it has to help to build up new tissues necessary for growth. Hence the diet of young people should, as a rule, be abundant, mixed, and sufficiently varied, but not highly seasoned. Delicacies and sweets are unnecessary.

Raw or uncooked food should be avoided, with the exception of fresh fruit.

The meals should be taken at fixed hours; they should be eaten without hurry. The food and drink when brought on the table should be neither ice cold nor too hot, and hard articles of food should be well chewed.

It is unfortunately a common delusion that alcoholic beverages are strengthening. Except when prescribed as a medicine, by a doctor, they should not be taken by school children.

The table beverages for children should be water or milk.

Strong stimulants, such as strong coffee and strong tea, are also injurious to children. It is a great mistake to take them with the object of overcoming fatigue during the preparation for examinations.

Parents should provide their children with their own drinking glasses or cups (when such are required) for use in the school; glasses should not be borrowed from other scholars.

The greatest caution should be observed with respect to drinking water in districts where it is not

quite free from suspicion of impurity, and especially in parts where epidemics of typhoid fever or cholera are liable to occur, or at times when such diseases are prevalent. The drinking water for daily consumption should be boiled, covered over, and allowed to cool. The taste may be improved by the addition of a little lemon juice.

Unfortunately, smoking is becoming more and more common amongst school children, and more common at an earlier age. Apparently the chief inducement to the habit is because it is forbidden. The tact of the teacher will be needed in choosing, in each case, according to the temperament of the scholar, the most suitable means of checking this habit.

It is important, on grounds of health, that the scholar should be accustomed to have the bowels moved daily at a definite hour—before school, or at least not during school hours.

If the bowels are regular, much fluid should not be drunk just before going to bed; also the urine should be passed just before getting into bed.

The scholar should wash the hands, face, and neck thoroughly in the morning. The teeth should be cleaned with a tooth-brush which is not too hard, both on the outer and inner surfaces, and the mouth then washed out thoroughly. (A little spirit or common salt may be added with advantage to the water used for washing out the mouth.)

If possible, the scholar should not study after the supper or evening meal. He may then devote himself to some light occupation of his own choosing. Amusements which are exciting, or which are continued late at night, as well as exciting reading, should be avoided.

The number of hours of sleep required by different individuals is not the same. Nevertheless, averages may be given according to the age of the scholar: From the seventh to the ninth year of life

(six to eight years old), 11 hours; in the tenth and eleventh year, 10 to 11 hours; in the twelfth and thirteenth year, 10 hours; in the fourteenth year, $9\frac{1}{2}$ hours; in the fifteenth and sixteenth year, 9 hours; in the following years of school life, $8\frac{1}{2}$ hours. In winter the scholar should be allowed to sleep (according to age) from half an hour to an hour longer than in summer. The time for going to bed should be fixed in accordance with the rules just stated.

It is desirable that children should be accustomed to sleep with the hands outside the bedclothes; also they should not lie on the back.

Every scholar should have daily some time free, so that there may be time for sufficient exercise, especially in the open air, as well as for some form of suitable occupation which the scholar may desire. This refers not simply to time for music, reading, or handiwork, but to time in which the scholars may have the opportunity for carrying out their own ideas and thinking for themselves, in reference to their hobbies, etc. All this is desirable both for the growth of the body and the development of a vigorous individuality in every sense.

Bodily exercises, however, should not be carried to excess. This is especially liable to occur in cycling, for example. As a rule, cycling should not be commenced before the age of fourteen years. Under the age of sixteen scholars should not cycle at a greater speed than nine to ten miles per hour on a level road.

Children often remain too long in cold baths. Even robust children should never remain longer than a quarter of an hour in the water.

From the standpoint of education, it is desirable that Sunday should be a day of complete rest, as free as possible from compulsory work. This holds good, of course, for Sunday morning.

In the advanced schools the requirements are

high, especially in the upper classes; hence it is important that the scholars of medium ability should not be burdened with compulsory work beside their school lessons (such as music, foreign languages, etc., in addition to the lessons given in these subjects in school). This is very important as regards school girls. If it is found that a scholar can only complete the lessons of the school by devoting the whole of his spare time to them, or by diminishing the hours of sleep, he should not be compelled to continue attending that school. Such a strain can be continued only at the expense of scholar's health—his most valuable possession for the future.

The scholar should do his school work regularly, in order that it may not accumulate just before the examination.

The health of the scholar is also sometimes impaired by excess of other work which he has to do, in addition to lessons, after school hours are over—home work and manual work of various kinds.

After recovery from an illness school work should not be pushed, and the children should not return to school too soon. These convalescent children have a diminished resisting power. They must be spared from overstrain at any price, even if they have to take a school class over again. Children convalescent from various ailments should not read much, because myopia (short sight) is very liable to commence at this time.

Experience has demonstrated that there is a diminished power of resistance in boys, especially just before puberty, and in girls at the commencement of puberty, and hence about this period special attention should be given to the health of the scholars.

Rest after dinner and after the evening meal, as well as sufficient sleep, is not wasted time. When the body is fatigued, or when the work of digestion

is being carried out, study is difficult, and attended with little result, or it is injurious to health. When the scholar does his school work he should be fresh, and not fatigued, and then the study should be done in earnest. In this way many useless hours of sedentary work are spared.

Girls during school life show decidedly less power of resisting illnesses than boys. They suffer more from anæmia, loss of appetite, frequently recurring headache, lateral curvature of the spine, etc. This fact has been firmly established by extensive observations made in different countries. Disregard of health at the age already mentioned is liable to produce an injurious effect on the whole of the after life, and this is especially the case in girls from the commencement of puberty.

Much mischief is done by unnecessary lessons in music and foreign languages, and by hand work in excess. Parents who have the welfare of their children at heart, might with advantage often consult their family doctor, both with reference to the course of study which their daughters propose to undertake, and with reference to their health generally, at the period of puberty.

Whilst reading, writing, or doing needlework at home, care should be taken that the light is satisfactory. But the direct rays of the sun should not fall on the work or paper. Artificial light should be good, but not dazzling, and it should not flicker. For writing, drawing, sewing, etc., the light should come from the left; hence the pupil should sit so that the windows, lamps, and lights are on the left side. Tables with round tops are not very suitable for writing upon. Care should be taken that the scholar does not sit in an oblique position, or with the back twisted or greatly bent forwards, or with the breast leaning on the edge of the table. The parents should persistently remind the children of these points when they are doing

their home lessons, and should train them, from an early age, to sit in a good position. The chairs or seats should also be of such a kind that a good position of the body can be maintained.

The top of the table should be so high above the seat of the chair on which the scholar sits that, when his arms are hanging down, the table level corresponds to that of the elbow. In the case of the younger scholars it may be necessary to make the seat higher by the use of a suitable cushion, in order that the right level may be maintained. On the other hand, a table which is too low will make it necessary for the scholar to stoop forwards very much in writing, and thus the breathing will be impeded. Children should sit with the whole of the perineum (seat) on the chair, and girls should not sit with the clothing all pushed to one side.

The chair should be placed so near the table, or, if necessary, should be pushed so far under the table, that the distance between the chair back and the edge of the table is only a little greater than the thickness (diameter) of the body from front to back. The portion of the chair seat made use of should be shorter (measured from before backwards) than the thigh. In order to make the chair seat shorter a firm cushion may be placed on the chair back.

The legs should neither be crossed nor drawn under the seat, nor should they hang down without touching the floor. The whole of the soles of the feet should rest on the floor, in such a manner that the knees are not drawn up to the abdomen. For the smaller scholars a footstool may be necessary.

Especially important is the right height of the table above the seat, and the right distance of the chair back from the edge of the table, since long maintenance of the body in the upright sitting posture necessitates considerable muscular work. The head should only be slightly bent forwards, and the eyes should be as far from the work as is allowed

by the length of the child's arm. In the case of the youngest scholars it is not possible, of course, that the desirable minimum distance of twelve inches can be obtained.

In writing, the forearm should rest for about two-thirds of its length on the table. The upper arm should be separated a little from the side. Books or papers, from which extracts are being copied, should not be placed laterally on the left side, but should be placed in front of the copy book or writing paper. Copy books with long lines should be pushed frequently towards the left, so that the part of the line on which the scholar is writing should always be approximately in front of the middle line of the body. In writing the lines at the lower part of the page, the copybook should be pushed to a suitable distance away from the body.

The index finger of the hand used in writing should be slightly arched. The penholder should be long, but neither very smooth (not of polished metal) nor very thin. The penholder should not be held too close to the pen, otherwise the child will have to incline the head sideways to the left in order to see the writing.

The writing should be discontinued periodically, in order to give the child short rests; since writing, when carried out properly, is very fatiguing. For the younger children the writing exercises should not be long.

The ink should be of such a kind that the writing appears deep black directly it is written. So long as slates are used they should be kept quite clean. If there should be lines on the slates, they must be renewed periodically to keep them distinct. In private tuition writing should be commenced at once with paper and pencil, and after six months pen and ink should be used.

In reading, a position of comparative repose—obtained by pushing back the chair and leaning

against an inclined chair back—can be maintained far better than in writing. It is fatiguing to look downwards to an extreme degree for a long period, and hence in writing the head must always be bent forwards towards the work. In reading, a suitable position of the book can be easily obtained by inclining it by means of objects placed behind it, or by holding it in the hand, etc.

Families in good circumstances should provide movable working desks for their children.

The school books, etc., are best carried in a knapsack, which should not be too heavy (not more than one-eighth of the weight of the scholar). It is advisable, therefore, that the articles carried in this knapsack should be inspected periodically, so that it does not contain more than is required at school.

The parents should not allow the scholars to do near fine work close to the eyes (such as reading, etc.) in the twilight, when lying down, when travelling, or at meal times. Also they should not allow scholars to read constantly a very small, fine, and close type. Very small and fine handwriting, as well as indistinct handwriting, should be discouraged. Also girls should not be allowed to do fine needlework continuously for long periods.

The clothing should be suitable to the season of the year, and should not impede the action of the respiratory, circulatory, and digestive organs. Hence tight collars, tight girdles or belts, garters generally, tight boots with small soles and high heels, tight bodices (corsets with steel or whalebone buckles), and heavy necklaces, should not be allowed. Stocking suspenders are preferable to garters.

In wet weather, when goloshes are not used, the boots should be changed at home, in order to keep the feet dry and warm. Goloshes should not be worn in the schoolroom.

During all vigorous bodily exercises woollen underclothing is preferable to linen.

A bath for purposes of cleanliness should be taken at least every fourteen days. In places where there are cheap public baths the scholar who wishes to use them should do so at a time when digestion is well advanced, and at an hour when the baths are least frequented. In the colder months the scholar should be warmly clothed, and should go home at once after the bath.

In warm weather it is desirable that the scholar should have the opportunity of taking cold baths or of bathing in places where there is no danger. Cold sponging is suitable, at all seasons of the year, for hardening the body. Scholars should be recommended to learn swimming. Cold baths should be forbidden, however, in certain affections—for example, in disease of the heart, of the lungs, or of the ears. It is therefore advisable that a medical man should be consulted with reference to the use of such baths.

The bed linen should be changed at least every fourteen days, and the underclothing at least twice a week.

The dwelling-rooms and bedrooms for school children should be light and well ventilated. Every day they should be thoroughly well ventilated, and fresh air allowed to blow freely through the rooms.

In the daylight, the scholar should be able to see some portion of the sky through the window, from the part of the room where he sits at his work. Rooms into which the sunlight penetrates are decidedly to be preferred to sunless rooms. Underground rooms, rooms which are badly heated, and those which are cold to the feet are unsuitable; rooms which are damp and those which are lighted only by reflected light are to be condemned. For each scholar the cubic space should not be under 20 cubic metres (706 cubic feet)—a moderate demand, since this figure corresponds, in a room $3\frac{1}{2}$ metres high ($11\frac{1}{2}$ feet), to a floorspace of less than three metres by two metres ($10\frac{1}{2}$ feet by 6 feet).

The bed should not be a very soft one, but should have a firmly-stuffed mattress. The bed clothes should not be too heavy. Every scholar should have his own bed.

Boarding scholars of different sexes should not sleep in the same room.

Spitting on the floor or into the pocket handkerchief should not be allowed. Expectorators of glass or glazed material are most suitable. They should be of such a shape that they cannot be easily upset, and they should contain water which can be changed daily.

The rooms should be thoroughly ventilated daily, and fresh air allowed to blow through the room in the morning with the bed clothes turned down.

Before the reception of a boarding scholar, a medical examination is very desirable, in order to avoid the risk of the introduction of infectious diseases into the boarding school.

When the scholar looks ill day after day, the advice of a doctor should be sought, although the scholar himself may not feel unwell. When an infectious disease breaks out, the opinion of the doctor must be taken respecting the isolation of the patients.

When spectacles are necessary, the advice of an ophthalmic surgeon should be obtained. In large towns glasses are supplied to poor children at a minimum cost through the Eye Hospitals.

Children should breathe with the mouth closed. Those who are not able to breathe through the nose should be examined by a medical man; (an affection of the back of the throat and nose due to "adenoid growths" may be the cause of this difficulty). Children with defective mental powers have sometimes made better progress after they have been enabled to breathe through the nose by medical treatment (removal of adenoids, etc.).

Good teeth are very important for health, and

this is also true with respect to the first teeth or milk teeth. It is desirable that every scholar should have the advice of a dentist yearly. The expense is small, as after the first treatment, very often at the subsequent examinations, for many years the teeth are found to be in a satisfactory condition. The advantage of the yearly examination is that by arresting a decay at an early stage the tooth may be saved for a long period. When a tooth is found to be affected, it should be "stopped" before toothache develops. When toothache begins the defect is usually already far advanced. Moreover, in the cavities of decayed teeth innumerable germs (bacteria) develop, which are invisible to the naked eye. Amongst these there may be the bacillus of diphtheria and of tuberculosis.

A scholar whose teeth are very much decayed may require to consult a dentist more frequently than once a year.

Children who are suffering from an infectious disease should not attend school; also other children who live in the same house should be kept at home. Scholars should not visit their school-fellows who are suffering from an infectious disease, and should not associate (in play, etc.) with children who live in the same house as sufferers from these diseases.

Children should not attend the funeral of persons who have died of infectious diseases.

Strangers should not be allowed to kiss children on the mouth; also children should not kiss dogs, cats, parrots, etc.

In administering corporal punishment the head should not be struck, since serious diseases might be caused thereby. A special warning may be given with respect to boxing the ears, which might cause a rupture of the drum of the ear, or inflammation of the middle ear, and as a consequence of the latter brain disease might occur and terminate fatally.

In the choice of an occupation, it is desirable that the work should be suitable with regard to the physical condition of the body. Thus, for example, a scholar suffering from a heart affection should not choose an occupation which demands great bodily exertion; a scholar suffering from lung disease should not choose an occupation which necessitates work in a dusty or otherwise impure atmosphere; a short-sighted scholar should not choose an occupation which necessitates much reading, etc., especially in an unsatisfactory light. On the other hand, there are occupations in which the work can be constantly carried out in a pure atmosphere, and even without much bodily exertion. Through the choice of an occupation which is most suitable for the bodily condition, serious impairment of health may often be prevented, and the individual may thus avoid the risk of becoming unable to follow his employment at an early period of life.

